

Castlemaine Naturalist

December 2017

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Scarlet Honeyeater – photo by Ash Vigus

SCARLET HONEYEATERS

George Broadway

There have been several recent reports of Scarlet Honeyeater sightings in the district. The first to my knowledge was from the Botanical Gardens, followed by others. I have spent quite a bit of time in the gardens in the area where they had been sighted but all to no avail. I did see a Mistletoe Bird in the area and wondered whether people were mistaken, but the evidence was overwhelming as sightings were reported by people who I regard as reliable bird spotters.

Then a few days ago Chris Timewell arrived at my door to report the presence of Scarlet Honeyeaters in McGregor Street which is beside my side fence. Naturally I then spent time in McGregor Street. McGregor Street runs alongside Victoria Gulley which is an impenetrable jungle of Silver Poplars and Blackberries. Still no sighting however.

Next thing my neighbour from over the back reported that he had seen them in his garden and had some photographs, so they had been just over my back fence. Eventually the same neighbour came to my door to report that they were calling in McGregor Street, so off we went to the spot, the same I believe where Chris had seen them. And there they were, glowing in the afternoon sun.

There is an article in the latest "Whirrakee" which reports an irruption of Scarlet Honeyeaters in Central Victoria, they have been sighted around Bendigo also. We might hope that they will stay around, they are such beautiful birds.

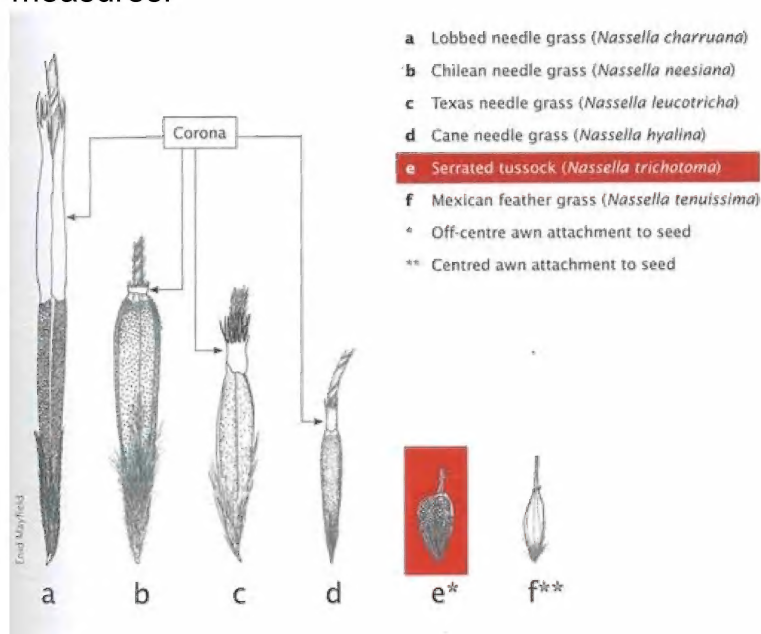
When Ern prepared the first list of birds of the Shire some years ago he recorded that there had been recent sightings. I have been keeping the bird list up to date but to the best of my knowledge there have been no more sightings - until these latest.

Invasive Needle-grasses from America

Peter Turner and Geraldine Harris

Those of us who attended the November CFNC meeting were fortunate to learn about invasive grass species that have the potential to become a real threat to the biodiversity of our region. Ian Higgins talked about the identifying features of Lobed, Cane, Texan and Chilean Needle-grass, Mexican Feather-grass, Serrated Tussock and Espartillo. While, sadly, many of these are now out of control in the grasslands to the north of Melbourne, around Castlemaine it is still possible to keep them at bay through a concerted approach.

Ian showed details of each of the needle-grasses, especially the definitive corona between the seed and the long fibre connected to the seed casing. Many of these invaders are difficult to distinguish from native spear grasses, and can most easily be identified when seeds have been set – which leaves little time for control measures.



The diagram at left shows a comparison of seed sizes and structure of coronas where seed is connected to the awn for *Nassella* species.

- [From R. Osmond et al (2008) Serrated Tussock-National Best Practice Manual. Victorian Department of Primary Industry.]

Ian showed maps prepared by DELWP of the predicted, very worrying, advance of these weeds if they are allowed to spread unchecked. We were also shown an interactive web map (ArcGIS) and a smart

phone app (ESRI Collector) that he and Margaret Panter use to record the location of Needle-grasses they find around Castlemaine – they have been working tirelessly to bring attention to this weed threat and would appreciate help identifying and mapping some of these invasive species so they might be targeted and eradicated instead of spread about by mowing etc. These maps should be used by the Mt Alexander Shire to avoid mowing before the weeds have been removed or sprayed. Details on the maps and how to use them have been emailed to CFNC members, and can be obtained from Ian Higgins [ianhiggins54@gmail.com] After his talk, Ian assisted members who had brought



Above – Ian Higgins at one of the locations in Campbell's Creek where Chilean Needle-grass was found.

- Photo Noel Young

samples of grasses to identify the good from the bad, to complete a stimulating and enlightening evening.

The excursion on Saturday 11th November was led by Margaret Panter, who has been waging war on local invasive needle-grasses for some years. A small but enthusiastic group of members met Margaret at the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens, at the Froomes Rd. entrance to the paths west of Barkers Creek. Margaret had marked Chilean and Cane Needle-grass plants, for spraying by CBG staff or hand removal.

The Chilean (*Nassella neesiana*) has purplish-brown seed packages, and looks very similar to native species such as *Austrostipa oligostachya* which is widespread in the western part of CBG. Pulling on an awn, the seed can be separated and examined using a lens or microscope, to reveal the characteristic corona with short hairs around its perimeter; the native species do not have a corona. We learnt more about identifying and removing *Nassella* species, and contributed to their removal from this area.



Clockwise from above:

1. Chilean Needle-grass *Nassella neesiana*
2. Detail of inflorescence
3. Seed with corona at junction with awn.

Photos: Peter Turner



In conclusion – check your gardens and nature strips! Last year the Turners discovered – and removed - a few grasses that we had not planted. It turned out they were *Nassella neesiana*, probably brought in when some landscaping was done in 2015. This year they removed a dozen more! Ian told us that the seeds can last 10 years...! If you are unsure about identification, contact Margaret Panter (5470 5072) or Ian Higgins (0418 539 670).

Notes and Specimens 1940

George Broadway

Continuing a series on readers specimens sent to Crosbie Morrison of "Wildlife" magazine in December 1940.

Flowers, etc

Kew: Your orchid is similar to Pink Fairies but the dark congested tip puts it in the related *Caladenia congesta*, the Black-tongue Caladenia.

Semaphore: a question concerning the Quandong.

E.Brighton: Practically all 400 Acacias are Australian natives. Related plants in other parts of the world are called Mimosa.

Insects

Thornbury: Harlequin bugs. Clean up all rubbish. Drench hiding places with boiling water or phenyle.

Hampton: A Cockroach, commonly called "Black Beetle" although it is not a beetle. Treatment – a mixture of flour and sugar, with an equal quantity of plaster of Paris well mixed and left lying on sheets of paper. Very shallow dishes of water with little cardboard ramps leading up to them.

Geelong: The Gum Emperor Moth. The caterpillars are beautifully coloured and feed on gum and pepper trees, and a number of other native and introduced plants.



Geelong: From your sketch, a Cabbage White Butterfly.

St Arnaud: Young Assassin Bug with undeveloped wings. Feeds on other insects, therefore is useful.

Mordialloc: Walking Stick Insect or Phasma. Well camouflaged with bits of stick and leaf.

Winchelsea: Tree Cricket or Long-horned Grasshopper. Feeds on wood and is harmless.

Flemington: Earwig. Harmless despite the fearsome appearance of the pincers on the tail.

E. Geelong: Not the dreaded wood borer but nevertheless a wood borer. The larva of *Phorocantha*, one of the Long-horned Beetles. Seldom attacks seasoned timber.

Wentworth: Cases of the Ribbed Casemoth.

Birds

Cohuna: Both Orange and Crimson Chats are nomadic. Both prefer drier regions. One visit of Orange Chats in 30 years is notable.

During the drought of 1914-15 Crimson Chats visited Cohuna in large numbers.

Mt Gambier: A Painted Snipe, found all over Australia except the centre. The only one of the three true snipe that breeds in Australia.

Spiders

Mont Albert: The so-called White-tailed Spider, as it does not really have a tail. Looks ugly but is harmless. It would not have been able to kill your canaries and budgies, more likely the red mite you mention. Dust the birds with a good insect powder and wash the cage with kerosene.

Yarpturk: A Trapdoor spider, possibly one of the group which does not actually build a door to the nest. Related to the Funnel-web but not dangerous.



White-tailed Spider

Miscellaneous

Caulfield: The Jerboa and Rat-kangaroo are two distinct animals. The Rat-kangaroo is a marsupial bearing its young in a pouch, the Jerboa which is a native of the Sahara is related to mice and rats.

North Richmond: Soft bodied Gecko lizard. Harmless, food is insects and grubs.

Coburg: The bird in your garden was a Yellow-faced Honeyeater.

W.Richmond: The platypus has fur, not feathers. It is definitely a mammal.

Cuckoo and host

Crosbie Morrison describes a Bird Day outing to Warrandyte where the party came across a Blue Wren's nest with 4 eggs;

'Three of the eggs were of the Wren, the fourth more elliptical and densely speckled, the egg of the Narrow-billed Bronze Cuckoo. Having seen the nest one of the ladies asked if I was going to leave the cuckoo egg. I explained that the Blue Wren eats a lot of insects but the Cuckoo eats even more including caterpillars which other birds will not touch. The Wren will have several clutches of young in a season, at least one of which will elude a cuckoo and be sufficient to maintain the population.

When we moved on leaving the cuckoo egg in place, the men of the party all agreed that we had done the right thing while all the ladies were in favour of the baby wrens.'

Bird Quiz

The bird featured last month was the Rufous Whistler. It can be found all over Australia, but in our area it tends to be a Spring migrant. The bird shown is a male, the female is more a drab brown with speckles on the front. The Rufous Whistler is sometimes referred to as the Thunder Bird, due to its habit of calling loudly on hearing a loud noise, such as an observer clapping hands. Its call can be described as Eeeeeee Chong.

The bird for this month is shown at right.



– Nigel Harland

Membership fees for 2018

At the Annual General Meeting in February this year, our Treasurer Geoff Harris reported that income over that previous two years had not been sufficient to cover the costs of running the club. Cost increases include printing and postage, and hire of the hall. Geoff foreshadowed an increase in membership fees for 2018.

While greater use of email for receiving the newsletter helps, the club cannot afford to reduce our limited reserve funds. Your Committee has therefore accepted the Treasurer's recommendation for an increase in some fees for 2018. The following motion will be put to members at the first General meeting in 2018, on Friday 11th February.

That the full membership fees be raised to \$35 (Single) and \$50 (Family) , and that the concession fees remain unchanged at \$25 (single) and \$30 (Family).

Note that the AGM next year will be held in March, as explained in the following item.

Financial Years, the CNFC Rules and the AGM.

As an Incorporated Association, CFNC Rules including financial year (FY) dates, are approved and recorded by Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV). Following the implementation of the new Act governing Incorporated Associations in 2012, CAV has informed us recently that their records show our Financial Year runs from 1st February to 31st January (not for the calendar year as we had thought), and that we operate under the Model Rules defined in the Act. To change either the FY date or our rules is costly in money and effort, requiring special meetings, which your committee does not believe are warranted.

The committee has therefore decided to hold the Annual General Meeting in March, to allow for decisions on issues such as membership fees to be decided by members at the February meeting.

Wildflower Notes

by Richard Piesse

On **October 22nd** GDTA ran a wildflower walk from the Coliban Channel on Fryerstown Rd. to the top of the Fryers Ridge and back.

Some 75 species were in flower, including 9 different Acacias (some at the very end of their flowering season); 10 different peas, including hectares of *Pultenaea humilis*; 5 different daisies; 4 bulbs (though few in number); both violets; both *Comesperma* (Heath Milkwort and Love Creeper); 8 orchids – again very few in number; and 3 Beard-heaths.

November 2 – 11, Old Fire Tower: Scores of Brown-clubbed Spider orchids (*Caladenia phaeoclavia*) have appeared on the Department's "helicopter landing site" and in the bushland opposite.

November 11, Visit with Geraldine to Old Fire-tower track: Phil and Judy Hopley found a new location for the White (or Fringed) Everlasting (*Leucochrysum albicans*) south of OFTT down near Old Coach Road. At this new location we also found *Calytrix tetragona* – Common Fringe-myrtle; *Prostanthera denticulata* –

Rough Mint-bush; and *Thelymitra ixioides* – Spotted Sun-orchid. The location can be added to Ern Perkins' Plant List map of the district.

This spring has given us great flowering on all the bushes and daisies, but the bulbs and orchids decided the season was too dry to produce strong flower heads. The exceptions were the Leopard Orchids and in some areas, the Spider Orchids.

SEANA Get-Togethers: Autumn and Spring 2018 and Spring 2019

Peter Turner

The South East Australian Naturalist Association Inc. links field naturalist clubs across Victoria and adjoining areas of South Australia and NSW to foster regional studies of natural history, and to promote conservation issues. SEANA camps or "Get-Togethers" are held twice each year, hosted by regional and Melbourne-based field naturalist clubs. The most recent was at the Little Desert, organized by Ringwood FNC.

The Autumn 2018 meeting is being hosted by FNC Victoria in the Healesville area on Friday 27th to Sunday 29th April. Copies of the first circular and registration form have been emailed to CFNC members, or can be obtained from FNCV (Phone 03 9877 9860; admin@fncv.org.au).

The 10th Get-together of Australian Naturalists' Network is being organised by SEANA. It will begin at Halls Gap in the Grampians on Saturday 29 September 2018 and conclude on Monday 8 October 2018 at Anglesea on the Surf Coast near Geelong. This is the middle of the Spring season in southern Victoria when many local communities hold native flower shows. For information contact Geraldine Harris, who is on the organising committee (gedharris49@gmail.com phone: 0407 663 109).

SEANA approached CFNC earlier this year requesting that we consider hosting one of the 2019 SEANA Camps/Get-togethers, as reported at the November general meeting. **The CFNC Committee has decided to offer to host the Spring 2019 meeting**, probably later in September or early October 2019. There are lots of details to sort out, although the main effort will not start until September 2018. We will be seeking volunteers to assist in various ways!

Roadside Clean-up on 20th of November

Geoff Harris

Our fourth Roadside Cleanup for the year was successfully completed on Monday morning. A good turn-up enabled us to be finished by 10.30. We collected 840 litres of cardboard/plastic/general stuff PLUS 1 car tyre, 1 sheet of iron, 1 car seat, 49 plastic bottles, 23 glass bottles, 90 aluminium cans & 7 golf balls. We saw good displays of Magenta Stork's-bill & Rough Spear-grass. Loose-flowered Bush-peas, Bluebells, Sticky Everlastings, Nodding Saltbush & Running Postman were also reported. Thanks to Bill, Geraldine, Sue, Jan, Peter, Helen, Cheryl, Ron, Phil & Judy.

<p>Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club</p>

Castlemaine Field Naturalists

Coming events

Fri December 8 meeting: Members night and break-up

Member's "show and tell" - share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. And bring a plate to share for supper.

The club's laptop and projector will be available. Please note that the meeting will be in the Chapel as the hall is affected by other activities.

Fri February 9 meeting: First meeting for 2018

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2017

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2017 Committee

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